



**Lifting Life's Possibilities**

# ALABAMA \* DMHMR *Outlook*

Jan./Feb. 2007

## FROM THE COMMISSIONER



As we begin the new calendar year of 2007, I want to express my pride and gratitude to all of our 2,800 employees and hundreds of people working for and with our community providers. Together, we have touched lives. Our theme for this year is "Lifting Life's Possibilities." That is our mission. Every individual employee in our Department, and every person working in the network of community providers is an important link in the chain of accomplishing that mission.

The key to our success is unity. If the DMH/MR advocacy groups and stakeholders work together in one accord, the entire mental healthcare system will benefit. This principle is implied in our theme "Lifting Life's Possibilities." Many people working together can easily lift a load that would be impossible for a small group to lift.

I am happy to introduce our new bi-monthly statewide newsletter, *DMHMR Outlook*. You will notice in reading this newsletter that there are articles about national issues, community initiatives and departmental accomplishments. The *Outlook* will be distributed within the Department and to community providers, advocates, and stakeholders. It is our hope that you will participate not only in receiving information from *Outlook*, but also using it as an instrument to inform others about issues and events as they unfold across our state.

This new year there will be many opportunities to serve. I know that you will rise to the challenges we face with enthusiasm and compassion. Together we can reap the rewards of helping people reach their full potential in recovery and self-determination. Together we can "Lift Life's Possibilities" for thousands.

*John M. Houston*

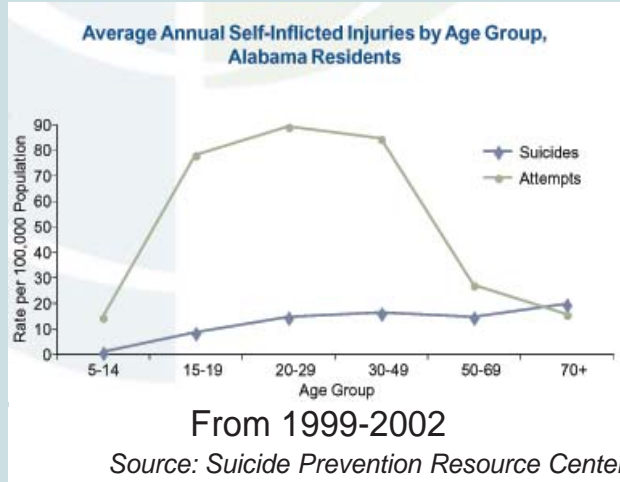
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## Labeling May Hamper Treatment of Depression

In December, the Food and Drug Administration's Psychopharmacologic Drugs Advisory Committee chose not to extend the black box labeling on antidepressants to all adults. However, recently the Committee voted to extend the existing pediatric black box label on all antidepressant medications to age 25, with the caveat that the labeling address the inherent risk of suicide in untreated depression – listening to the concerns of the leading national mental health and suicide prevention organizations in its Open Letter on Antidepressants to the FDA.

The impact of the warning label may present a serious problem. Since the black box warning went into effect in 2004 for children and youth, emerging data indicates that treatment and identification rates for depression have dropped. This labeling could further add to the formidable barriers for people of all ages in getting the help they need and recovering from their illness. As is well known, 90 percent of suicides are attributed to untreated or undertreated depression. For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).



## National Anti-Stigma Campaign Launched

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the Ad Council recently launched the National Anti-Stigma Campaign, releasing a national survey of public attitudes on stigma and unveiling free multimedia public service announcements.

For the first time in history, the authority of the federal government is being put behind a sustained national PSA campaign to reduce stigma and encourage support of people with mental illnesses. It is also the first time that the leverage of the Ad Council, the people who brought us Smokey the Bear, is being made available to the entire mental health community.

Download the PSA's at:  
<http://www.whatadifference.org/>.

## National Association Changes Name

The organization formerly known as the National Mental Health Association has changed its name to Mental Health America. The name was chosen to communicate how fundamental mental health is in the overall health and well-being of every American.

Mental Health America has been around for nearly a century as a growing movement of Americans who promote mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation. To find out more, visit [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org).

## Congress Adjourns for the Year Leaving Questions

In December, the 109th Congress adjourned for the year leaving a number of issues unresolved, including FY 2007 spending bills covering all domestic agencies, including mental illness research and services. When the new Congress convenes in January, it will be forced to complete work on these separate spending bills for the current fiscal year, as early as February 15.

Instead of addressing the bills, Congress passed a "continuing resolution" that will keep most federal agencies and programs operating close to current FY 2006 levels through February 15, 2007. That means most federal agencies – including the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – will have been operating under their FY 2006 budgets for nearly five months into FY 2007.

In the final days of this year's session, Congress did act on a massive \$45.1 billion package that includes extension of health provisions. Among provisions in this package are extension of the 1996 mental health parity bill.

As noted above, the massive tax and trade package includes a one-year renewal of the 1996 Mental Health Parity Act. This law requires parity (i.e. equity between mental health and physical health) for annual and lifetime dollar limits in health insurance plans. Beyond renewal of the 1996 law, the sponsors of full parity legislation (requiring equitable coverage with respect to cost sharing, deductibles and limits on inpatient days and outpatient visits) remain committed to pushing legislation in 2007.

### Greil Hospital Welcomes Visitors From The Ukraine

In December, Greil Hospital welcomed five visitors from the Ukraine, a free democratic nation which was once a part of the Soviet Union before the fall of communism. The visitors were part of a delegation visiting Montgomery through the organization Friendship Force, which seeks to promote international good will and cooperation by having persons from different nations visit each other's countries. The visitors were social workers, business persons, and civic officials. During their time in our area they also visited with Probate Judge Reese McKinney, Mayor Bobby Bright, and Governor Bob Riley, as well as seeing many other local organizations and facilities at work.

The delegates had many questions about Greil and the types of care that we give here. They were extremely impressed with the cleanliness and quality of our facility and the friendly reception they received. They particularly enjoyed the Christmas decorations that are set up around the hospital. They will carry these positive impressions back home, where this visit might well have far-reaching impact on the care of the mentally ill in a developing nation.

### News on Bailey Deaf Unit

The Bailey Deaf unit moved a huge step closer to full-time operations as the start of 12/ 7 programming (12 hours a day/ 7 days a week) began mid-December.

The unit is located at Greil Hospital in Montgomery and is awaiting the hire of two direct care staff to move to 24 hour/ 7 days a week operations.

Also making news for the facility, Scott Staubach began his duties as the permanent director of the Bailey Deaf Unit in mid-December. Steve Hamerdinger had been in the acting director capacity since last March.

### DMH/MR Employee to Speak at Association Meeting

Shannon Weston-Byrd, Grants and Community Outreach Coordinator in the Office of Policy and Planning, will present "Effective Communication for Mental Health Practitioners in the Public Policy Arena" at the January 25, Roundtable Discussion Series hosted by Mental Health America in Montgomery (formerly Mental Health Association in Montgomery).

Ms. Weston-Byrd will describe the legislative process and discuss effective communication techniques in the public policy arena, as well as identify the Department's 2007 legislative priorities.

### Attorney Appointed

The Substance Abuse Division recently announced the appointment of Eason Mitchell as the consumer representative to the Advocacy Advisory Board for the Department. Mr. Mitchell is an attorney in Tuscaloosa.

### Cool Harley Riders Take Presents to Kids at Bryce



Recently, riders with The Heart of Dixie Harley Owners Group rode to Bryce Adolescent Facility to give the children there Christmas gifts they collected. The group chose the Bryce Ride as one of their primary charity rides of the year.

### Spring Mental Retardation Conference Coming Soon

The 28th annual spring MR Conference will be held March 5-7, 2007 at Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama. The theme for the conference will be, "It's My Life, Can You Help? Providing Opportunities for a Healthy, Safe and Happy Tomorrow." This conference, sponsored by Region III Community Services and the Division of Mental Retardation of the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, will feature more than 15 speakers at the event, including Dr. Richard Powers on Medication Administration, Elber Johns with Arc Link, Holly Janczak with QMRP/Ethics, Dr. Todd Luellen on Psychiatric Issues and many more.

Early Bird Registration ends February 16, 2007, and costs \$100. Reservations must be made by February 16 to receive the group rate as well. The conference will provide 14.5 (17.0 for nurses) hours of continuing education credits, and the \$20 is payable on site.

Exhibit registration is \$50 and advertisements are \$25. The deadline for this is February 16, 2007. For more information or to register, call Jeff Williams with the Division of Mental Retardation at (334) 242-3701.



## Apartments Receive "Right Stuff" Award

Albertville's Angela Meadows Apartments received an award of \$1,000 in honor of its work providing affordable housing for special needs residents in the Marshall County area. The funds were presented by the Alabama Housing Finance Authority and were part of a 2006 Community Impact Best Practices



*The \$1,000 monetary gift was given to Angela Meadows owners Olympia Construction Inc. and Albertville Housing Development Corporation.*

"Right Stuff" award given to AHFA by the Valued Advisor Fund. Recipients of this award must demonstrate leadership, creativity and the ability to work creatively with multiple stakeholders to effectively serve their communities in developing infrastructure, housing and/or commercial enterprises.

The "Right Stuff" was granted to the Alabama Housing Finance Authority in recognition of their collaborative work with the Alabama

Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, local public housing authorities and the development industry. This collaborative effort created an unprecedented housing program that serves residents of Alabama who receive support from DMH/MR outside of institutional environments.

The 48-unit complex houses special needs residents and was the first of several of AHFA's pioneering apartment developments to be available to DMH/MR residents. "Angela Meadows is an excellent example of the success of our special needs housing initiative," said AHFA Executive Director Robert Strickland. "This money will go toward maintaining safe, decent and affordable housing for people with mental disabilities."

## Gordon Named Shoals Woman of the Year

Natalie Renee Gordon of Florence has been named the 2006 Shoals Woman of the Year. As a social worker and the site manager for Riverbend Residential Services, Gordon's entire life is built around helping others, generally those with mental illness and substance abuse issues. According to Gordon, just knowing she has helped someone else is a great accomplishment. "I am so grateful to Riverbend for giving me the opportunity," she says. "The past 29 years have been such a rewarding experience."

In the late 1960s, she battled cancer and went through a life-threatening surgery. She lost her left arm and shoulder, but not her spirit. "I could have resorted to signing up for disability. I could have let the loss of my arm be an excuse to live a life of self-pity," she says. "But I grew up with the instinct of wanting to work, and I have never shied away from anything."

Gordon's dedication to her work and her continued desire to put her clients first has drawn recognition. She has received numerous accolades, including the

*(story cont. on pg. 5)*

## National Spotlight on MARC services

At the Arc of the United States Annual Convention in San Diego in October, Dr. Deborah Cohen, Chair of Health Promotion and Disability Prevention Committee, presented Jo Shannon, President of Mobile Association of Retarded Citizens, the Peter J. Leibert Community Action Prevention Award. Dr. Wladimir Wertelecki, Professor and Chair of Department of Medical Genetics, University of South Alabama chaired the Prevention Committee for MARC.

The Peter Leibert Community Prevention Action Award is given to a local chapter of the U.S. for its innovativeness of prevention activity or array of activities designed to reduce the incidence of mental retardation. Through MARC's prevention committee the Birth Defects Surveillance Center was developed and has been established in 24 hospitals in Alabama. Statistics reflect the program has been successful and efforts are in progress to expand.

Ms. Shannon also accepted on behalf of MARC's Recreation Department, the Boggs Mitchell Award, which is given to a chapter or community organization that provides a year-round, challenging and inclusive program for people with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities, a recreation/leisure time program. MARC has an array of programs including participants from the community.

## Gordon Named Shoals Woman of the Year

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Employee of the Year Award from the Shoals Area Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Mental Health Worker Award from the Shoals Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the Intensive Clinical Services Staff Member of the Year Award at Riverbend. These honors simply verify what Gordon has always known: She was meant to be a social worker.

She believes in the "people first, disability second" mentality and if others learn just one thing from her struggles, it is the miracle of hope. "In all that I do, I hope I will have left a positive impact on those individuals with or without mental or physical limitations so they will always know that, to overcome obstacles, you must first believe in yourself," she says. "Don't give up. Continue to strive to be the best you can be and know that you will and can succeed."

## DMH/MR Employee Feted

W.D. Partlow Developmental Center's Yvonne Rutledge, Vocational Services, received the Tuscaloosa Employment and Support Services Association's 2006 Professional of the Year Award at their annual Open House and Awards Ceremony in the fall.

Ms. Rutledge was recognized for her outstanding leadership role in providing services to people who are mentally and physically challenged.

## Substance Abuse Advocate Honored Twice

Substance Abuse advocate Mike McLemore recently received two awards. The Winfred Jr. Dunham award was presented by Alabama Voices for Recovery and the Drug Education Council, Inc. He also received the Sherri Ingram-Cohan Award from Friends of Recovery of Morgan, Limestone and Lawrence counties.

Both awards are given yearly for promotion of advocacy and consumer rights in the field of substance abuse.

To find out more information about how you can help advance the substance abuse advocacy movement throughout the state, contact Bill Layfield, president of Alabama Voices of Recovery, at 251-478-7855. You can also contact Mike McLemore at 256-796-4490, FORMLL@msn.com or P.O. Box 320, Eva, AL 35621.

## Board Member Given "Lifetime Achievement Award"

The Mobile Area Council on Addictive Disorders recently presented Shoulder Director Phillip Drane of Mobile with the Josephine Dix Award. The award recognizes those who exhibit tireless dedication in the field of substance abuse education, prevention and particularly in relieving the suffering of those afflicted with addictions.

"This is a lifetime achievement award presented to leaders in the field of addiction," said Virginia Guy of Mobile, Executive Director of the Drug Education Council. Drane was chosen due to his "steadfast loyalty in making the world a better place," Ms. Guy said. "He has dedicated so much of his life to this field and has made a significant contribution in restoring families and our community."

The award is presented annually by the Mobile Area Council on Addictive Disorders, (MACAD) an association of counselors and agencies which offer or specialize in treatment and prevention of addictions of all kinds.

Drane has guided The Shoulder since August 1988, a Christian, Twelve-Step Recovery center located in Daphne. Phillip Drane's experience extends far beyond The Shoulder. In recognition of his expertise in the field of addictions, Governor Bob Riley appointed Drane to the state Board of Trustees of the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation in April 2003. He now serves as chairman of that board. Drane also serves at the state level on the Management Steering Committee of the Department of Mental Health, and also the Substance Abuse Advisory Subcommittee.



*Drane credits his family for their support of his ministry. At left is Drane's wife Jacquie, and to the right is son Carter, both of Mobile. Not pictured is son Kevin Drane of Covington, LA.*

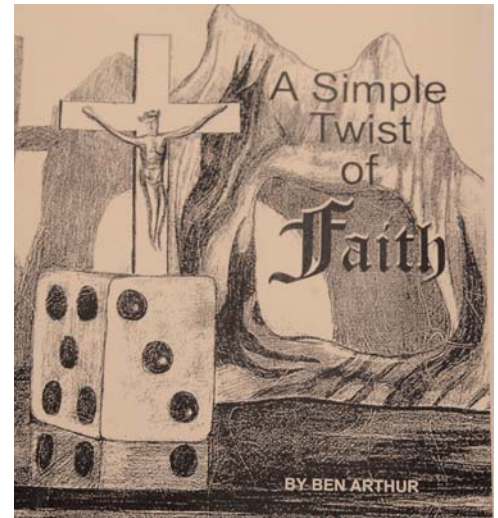
## Consumer Publishes Book About His Journey

Ben Arthur had his first episode of schizophrenia in 1977, and had a long, uphill road to recovery. He had to learn to interact appropriately with people again and faced many other obstacles. With treatment and his relationship with Christ, he has been able to raise two children and enjoys a relationship with his grandchildren.

But something that has always been a part of Ben's life is art. He studied art at several area universities, and enjoys graphic arts, pen and ink and pencil drawing. Ben's love of art has led him to publish a book called "A Simple Twist of Faith." The book is filled with various poems and mostly pen and ink drawings he has put together since 1993.

Ben says although the subject matter touches on several topics, the overall theme of the book is redemption. It comes back to him asking questions of God, and coming to the realization of his own spirituality. He says it is hard to say what motivates him as he has always loved to draw, but that, "the poetry is a therapeutic way for me to express feelings about situations going on in my life."

The book has been received fairly well, as Arthur says that his church has bought a lot of the books and helped him promote the book. The book is for sell online at [lulu.com](http://lulu.com), and Ben is currently working on another book.



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